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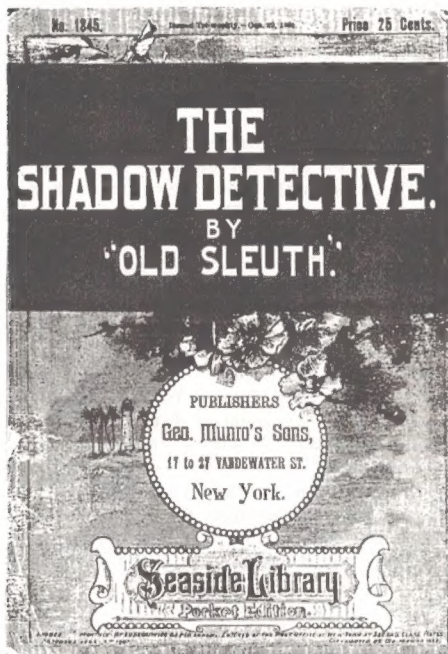
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THE SYNDICATE OF RASCALS: THE MEN BEHIND NICK CARTER

By J. Randolph Cox



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A SYNDICATE OF RASCALS: THE MEN BEHIND NICK CARTER

By J. Randolph Cox

Some of the standard reference works identify the NICK CARTER stories as having been written by "a syndicate of authors." Since one of the titles of a NICK CARTER novel in the New Magnet Library is A SYNDICATE OF RASCALS, I have borrowed that title for this study. The three writers under discussion are not the only writers of NICK CARTER, of course, but they may be considered among the most significant of the many. The first, John R. Coryell, was the creator of the character and author of the original novels; the second, Frederic Van Rensselaer Dey, was for many years the major writer on the series; the third, Frederick W. Davis, was among the most dependable and, in many ways, among the best of the later writers.

I have chosen to look closely at the first three stories by each of these writers which they contributed to the *New York Weekly*. In the case of Dey and Davis, these were not the first NICK CARTER stories they had written, merely the first they wrote as serials for that story paper. I will note some of the similarities and differences, the consistencies and inconsistencies by which each author presented the character of NICK CARTER over the years. Coryell's serials appeared between 1886 and 1888, one story each year. Dey's first three serials all appeared in 1892, and Davis's in 1906.

John Russell Coryell (December 15, 1851-July 15, 1924) is considered the creator of the character of NICK CARTER, although the first story may have been worked out in a conference session with publisher Ormand G. Smith before pen was put to paper. The conference sessions between editor and writer were a feature at Street & Smith that survived into the 20th century and the famous pulp era of the 1930s. Coryell was well-traveled, had lived in China in the 19th century, and entered the ship-brokerage business in San Francisco where he lost all his money by being a poor business man. He turned to being a newspaper writer in order to earn a living.

Coryell's first stories were juvenile ones he wrote for *St. Nicholas*, *Harper's Young People*, and *Golden Days*. In the 1880s he convinced Street & Smith that he could write as good a detective story as any of their regular writers. The fact that he was a cousin of the publisher. Ormond Smith, may have had something to do with the ready acceptance of the dare. His first serialized novel was *THE AMERICAN MARQUIS; OR, A DETECTIVE FOR VENGEANCE*, which appeared in the *New York Weekly* between March 30 and June 15, 1885. It was signed by the pen name "Milton Quarterly" and appears to have been enough of a success for him to have been encouraged to submit another one.

The next novels Coryell wrote made up the original NICK CARTER trilogy, *THE OLD DETECTIVE'S PUPIL; OR, THE MYSTERIOUS CRIME OF MADISON SQUARE* (*New York Weekly*, September 18-December 11, 1886), *A WALL STREET HAUL; OR, A BOLD STROKE FOR A FORTUNE* (*New York Weekly*, March 12-June 18, 1887), and *FIGHTING AGAINST MILLIONS; OR, THE DETECTIVE IN THE JEWEL CAVES OF KURM* (*New York Weekly*, September 29, 1888-January 19, 1889). The author was in his mid-thirties. Coryell then had Nick Carter retire from active service, turn over the detective business to a successor, while the author went on to write other stories and articles under his own name as well as a number of pen names.

In an article in *The Bookman* for July, 1929, "The Birth of Nick Car-

ter," Coryell's son, Russell, describes him as "a curious mixture of sincere modesty and breath-taking self-assurance. He was sure of his ability as a craftsman, sure of the soundness of his logic, sure of his comprehension of definite fields of knowledge—but he was equally sure of his limitations, always ready to listen attentively to anyone's opinion and grant their greater knowledge in fields in which he was not familiar." He was also credited with having "astounding gall."

Russell Coryell claimed his father worked out the complete plots for his novels in his head before beginning to write. "Situation was always more important to him in detective tales than character...[he] conceived the situation first and then decided what character would best fit that." Even the installments of the serials were worked out in detail before they were written down. Writing for Coryell was a matter of transcribing his mental vision.

He wrote rapidly, never reread or corrected his copy, and never reread the published stories. His wife clipped the *New York Weekly* serials, pasted them in scrapbooks, where his sons discovered them years later and learned that their father was the original NICK CARTER writer.

A temperamental writer, family disturbances could easily upset Coryell's work routine. A small man, stout in his later years, he had a high forehead, long nose, deep-set eyes with heavy brows, firm mouth and square chin. He apparently never had a high regard for his NICK CARTER stories until the last six or seven years of his life. Then he admitted his fatherhood of the great detective and wrote an article for *Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine* about how real Nick Carter had become to many people. He was as real to some readers as Sherlock Holmes had become to others.

The three novels really make up a unit, in spite of the fact that a year or more separates the last two in date of publication. The character of Nick Carter develops as changes in his life and profession are revealed. It is a sort of popular *bildungsroman* (as the Germans call it) in which "the theme is the development of [Nick Carter] from youth to manhood."

THE OLD DETECTIVE'S PUPIL: Briefly, Nick's father, Sim Carter, is approached by banker Gerald Livingston for help in locating his missing daughter, Mabel. Nick asks to be allowed to take this case himself and does the initial investigation disguised as his own father. Nick's investigation seems to stir up a hornet's nest which provides tragedy—his father is murdered. Nick then has a double goal: find Mabel Livingston and find the murderers of his own father. In the course of the story he also meets Ethel whom he eventually marries.

The story ends with this passage: "From out of a great deal of unhappiness came a great deal of joy, and the only regret was that Old Sim Carter should not have lived to see the triumphant ending of his son's first case." (p. 210)

This is a very complex story enlivened (and even relieved) by some witty dialogue and a sense of fun. Nick is presented as a very boyish character whose real face is seldom presented to anyone, nor is the name Nick Carter attached to him directly. For much of the story Ethel knows him only as "Mr. Johnson."

There are some classic passages which it is tempting to recall: "The small fist took the fellow under the jaw, fairly lifting him off his feet, and hurling him senseless on the floor. 'Well,' said Nick, coolly, 'there's nothing like beef tea, after all, for quieting a man's nerves. I guess he's had a dose he won't forget.'" (pp. 32-33)

A WALL STREET HAUL: In each of the first two novels Coryell introduces characters or situations that are taken up and explored at greater

length in the next novel. Likewise, in the second novel, there are references to what happened in the previous story.

A WALL STREET HAUL concerns the theft of \$3,000,000 from the 15th National Bank in Wall Street. Finding the thief takes Nick and his new wife, Ethel, to various parts of New York City, London, and Paris. Eventually he fixes the blame on Howard Wilshaw, the husband of Grace Eldredge whose father is the well known banker, Maurice Eldredge.

Again, the story is carried along partially by the situations, but largely by the witty dialogue and Nick's running commentaries on the plot developments. Throughout the entire story Nick is in disguise and presents himself not as detective Nick Carter, but detective Harvey Jones. As in THE OLD DETECTIVE'S PUPIL, no one but Ethel, his wife, ever sees his real face.

The story is filled with comments about the fascination that hunting down a mystery holds for Nick. There is a rapport between Nick and Ethel who communicate by verbal signals only they can recognize to test the veracity of a message sent from one to the other. One of these is another layer of disguise; to each other they are Mr. and Mrs. Johnson. The human touch is presented when Nick seems so intent on the case that he ignores his wife; Ethel is disturbed and quick to object. (pp. 92-93)

The theme of rival detectives (so prevalent in the dime novel world) is not forgotten here as the reader is introduced to Mat Solomon who has little use for detective Harvey Jones. The amateur detective as comic relief is represented by Captain Albert Raudone, a would-be detective whom Nick befriends in Paris. These characters will be seen again in the trilogy.

Not the least of the qualities possessed by this novel are the number of what might be termed "throwaway situations" by which the reader is entertained, and which help to give some depth to the character of Nick Carter, but which do not necessarily advance the plot. Early in the story, Nick (in disguise) draws the attention of a messenger boy by seeming to be in pursuit of a man up ahead. The boy, thinking he'll have some fun with this old gaffer, calls out to Nick, "Has he got yer watch, mister? Is de baby sick?" (p. 16) How many times, one wonders, did street boys in the 1880s use these forms of speech against passersby?

At a later point, Herbert Bedford admitted to having a secret source of income.

"Did you ever hear of Franklin Holt?"

"The author?" [both Nick and Herbert's father asked]

"Yes."

"I always read what he writes," said Nick.

"So do I," said Mr. Bedford.

"I am sorry you both have such bad taste," said Herbert, "as to read such stuff. I am Franklin Holt." (p. 66)

Such a passage provides contemporary commentary on the status of popular writers in the 19th century.

But perhaps the most telling passage is that in which the whole art of the dime novel detective is made light when Nick calls on his father-in-law, Gerald Livingston, banker and announces himself since he is heavily disguised.

"I am Nick." [he says]

"I might have known it," laughed Mr. Livingston. "I'm prepared to have any man, woman, or child tell me the same thing." (p. 219)

In this novel we are also introduced to the mysterious Baron D'Orment and his two sword-carrying servants "strange, foreign-looking men, stern, even fierce of aspect." (p. 171) By the end of the story, two

secondary characters, Herbert Bedford and Mattie Hooper, are married to each other and Grace Eldredge disappears in the company of the Baron. (We will meet them again.) Having satisfactorily concluded the case, Nick and Ethel settle down to the quiet life until...

FIGHTING AGAINST MILLIONS. As this novel opens, Nick is shown to be the father of a baby boy, Ralph Carter. He is not faced with a mystery brought to him by a client, but from something within his own life. For the past six months he had had a surprising number of failures in the cases he has taken. There are rumors that he has been "bought off" by many criminals and his reputation is further tarnished when three of the houses he owns are set on fire right after he has sent Ethel to renew the insurance policy on them. The newspaper account of the fire is particularly damaging since it identifies Nick Carter with one Harvey Jones and casts aspersions on Ethel's reputation. It is as though some enemy is watching them so he determines to take his family and disappear until the enemy is found.

Nick and Ethel wake in the middle of the night to hear a woman's voice swearing vengeance for past deeds, baby Ralph is missing, and the house is on fire. In his escape from the fire, Nick encounters his old rival, Matt Solomon, who tries to arrest him for arson.

The quest for his kidnapped son leads Nick across the continent of Europe to a hidden kingdom called Kurm where the kidnappers, Baron d'Orment and Grace Eldredge, rule and have plans to raise Ralph Carter in a manner that will bring shame upon his father. This also takes the book out of the realm of detective fiction and into fantasy or high adventure, demonstrating why some collectors of so-called "lost race" stories might wish to seek it out. On his way to Kurm, Nick makes a perilous journey across the valley known as the Home of Death where a strange poisonous cloud hovers over all. It is only the training Nick received from his father that saves him, for the strength is his that can carry not only himself (crouching at a level to avoid the poison fumes) but a companion on his back.

Nick succeeds in this case not only by his own detective skill, but by the fortunate likeness he bears to a messiah for which the people of Kurm await. He is known as "Nikar, the deliverer" and the scene in which he fulfils the prophecy of the deliverer coming from the sky is both thrilling and appropriate: he parachutes from the cliff above the city clad in a suit of chain mail.

As with the other two novels by Coryell, there is a quality of tongue-in-cheek to the passages in which the detective art comes in for its share of gentle ridicule, particularly the dependence of the detective on the art of disguise. Mattie Hooper says to Nick, "You are such a man of disguises that I am never sure it is really you I am talking to." (p. 36)

Later, Nick calls on Captain Raudone in Paris, the man who still yearns to be a detective. The Captain is such a protegee of Nick's he has had a room in his house in Paris fitted up to resemble Nick's work-room in New York.

"I grow worse and worse every day," [confesses the Captain] "Why half the time I am in one disguise or another. And I am improving."

"I know you are," [Nick replies.]

"You. How do you know?"

"I saw you in Harve a few days ago."

"You knew me! *Parbleuf* And that was my best disguise."

Nick laughed at his dismay.

"And a very good one, too; but you must remember I am something of

an expert at detecting disguises." (p. 107)

It is these aspects of self-awareness that raise the Coryell trilogy from the level of mere thriller to a work that not only repays reading, but rereading.

Frederic Merrill Van Rensselaer Dey (February 10, 1861-April 26, 1922) was the dreamer of the three writers. He was also, by some accounts, the quintessential dime novelist who wrote fast for enough money to satisfy ever-increasing debts. A graduate of Columbia University law school, he practiced law in Brooklyn, and served as assistant corporation counsel and junior partner in the firm of William J. Gaynor, later Mayor of New York. After taking up writing for enjoyment, Dey discovered he could make money from it as well. He was 30 years old when he was hired by Street & Smith to turn the NICK CARTER serials of John R. Coryell into a long-running series. He probably wrote more NICK CARTER stories than any other individual. When he died in 1922, by his own hand, he had not written a NICK CARTER for nearly a decade.

If Coryell planned his trilogy as a unit, Dey seems to have started on page one and made things up as he wrote. The first chapter of NICK CARTER AND THE GREEN GOODS MEN (1892) tells the reader enough about this peculiar type of swindle for him to be able to follow the rest of the story. Nick doesn't even appear until the second chapter (a situation that is the pattern in much of Dey's work) and then he is quite a different man from the one who parachuted into the major city of Kurm and who raced death across the valley of bones carrying a man on his back. Dey's Nick Carter is older, self-assured, confident, even quiet. He is known as the Little Giant, a term applied to him by Sindhar, the Arabian crook in "Nick Carter, Detective," in the first issue of the *Nick Carter Library* in 1891. He is only occasionally given to interior monologues and then without the self-deprecating humor that Coryell had him employ.

This is a novel containing a series of adventures tied together by the central gang of crooks, the green goods swindlers, and Dan Dorrance, the master crook of them all. There is no doubt who the villains are, the suspense comes in seeing how or when they shall fall. The trouble with the story is there are too many villains. It is difficult to keep them straight. Dan Dorrance is the head of the Green-Goods gang, but who is Madame Mystery (also known as Bess), and who is Mabel Dent, also known as Queen Mab? One suspects that Dey's reading of the classics, including Shakespeare, has influenced him in the peopling of his fictional world and in the naming of his characters.

The reader is allowed to see the deeds of these characters as closely as the deeds of the detective and the point of view is varied. We see Nick at work against the crooks, but we are also allowed to watch Dorrance fabricating his own death in chapter 26.

If there are multiple villains, there are many guises to Nick Carter. He appears as four separate and distinct characters: Snoozer, a tough; Thomas Bolt, also known as "Old Thunderbolt," a detective; Joshua Juniper, a stereotypical farmer or countryman; and a Chinese laundryman. Sometimes we watch him change characters between the time he walks from one end of the hallway to the other.

The story is filled with constant reminders that Nick is a famous detective. The professional tools of his trade are described, his pick-locks, his dark lantern, his armaments, and his abilities at disguise. Yet, for all of his expertise, no one seems to remain fooled for very long. While the switch from one disguise to another is swift (from Joshua Juniper to the Chinese and back to Juniper once more), each of his guises seems to be something of a joke. Each of these alter egos is a caricature

and he appears more frequently in his own persona.

Dey's Nick Carter muses aloud as does Coryell's, but the monologues are not as witty. They function largely to advance the plot or to fill space while the author figures out what will happen next. There is much use of epithets such as "Bah!" or "Humph!" Dey achieves cliffhanger endings to his chapters by introducing fresh twists to the plot. Nick will walk into a room to find a complete stranger lying murdered on the floor and one of the key players in the drama missing.

Coryell's Nick Carter worked largely by himself, occasionally with a helper. Dey's Nick Carter is accompanied by an agency of assistants, primarily Chick Carter. Ethel Carter is only infrequently mentioned and the other key player, Patsy, is still a young boy.

The plot of NICK CARTER AND THE GREEN GOODS MEN involves true and false identities as well as the hidden past in the life of many of the characters. Somehow the tortuous route of the plot leads to a solution to the mystery and an unmasking of the major villain at the inquest in the final scene. As though he knew how complicated he had made things, Dey writes at last:

Who would have thought that the mere visit of Henry Blake, who came all the way from Texas to New York City, in answer to an ordinary green-goods circular, would have uncovered such a mare's nest as it did? (p. 297)

But, by then, the story is nearly ended.

Dey's second serial, THE MYSTERIOUS MAIL ROBBERY may not be a carbon copy of THE GREEN GOODS MEN, but it continues the same structure as the first story. A crime is described in detail in the first chapter; Nick Carter is brought into the case in the second, and a series of episodes follow. In this instance the crime is the theft, by some clever means, of the registered mail sack from a mail van while it is parked in front of the New York Post Office. This is truly a daring daylight robbery. Within two or three chapters the robbery has been accompanied by a murder. By the middle of the novel, Dey takes a step back and sums up the situation:

Nick Carter's United States Government case suddenly began to assume alarming proportions...The case had begun with a robbery on the highway, had jumped to the murder of a supposed bootblack, and then to the abduction of a young girl; the use of a yacht which belonged to a lady in the highest circle of society had become involved in the matter, after which followed the affair of the necklace and the assassination of Clarence Tuttle. It was a remarkable chain of events, and the detective felt that he was confronted by the greatest puzzle of his life. (pp. 90-91)

But there are still some 120 pages left to the story.

This is the point in the story where the reader may feel entitled to a few explanations. Some of these, including the relationship between the major characters in the mystery, are supplied by a letter left to Nick by the murdered man, Clarence Tuttle, "To be delivered, unopened, by the finder, in case of accident to me." It is as simple a plot device as that.

Dey's plots themselves are never simple. The reader may be forgiven for losing hold of one or more threads while Nick, in disguise, seems to be questioning people who have nothing to do with the main mystery. Eventually, matters are explained and "the reader can now comprehend the chain of events perfectly," as is stated at the conclusion of one startling series of revelations (p. 159).

Nick's deductions are based on careful observation and sound reasoning. He can identify the smoker of a cigar by the way the teeth marks are set into the stub. He can recognize the teeth marks and know without

a doubt if the same man has smoked a second cigar that bears the same marks.

Mystery follows mystery, cliffhanger follows cliffhanger until at last Nick has exposed the schemes of Matthew Prime and his henchman, the "Hindoo strangler," Moro. Dey's portrayal of Nick Carter is consistent with that in the earlier serial, a serious young/old man who is confident that he stands at the top of his profession. Out of disguise he appears to be a young man, but he seems old in the ways of the criminal world. Patsy has more to do in this story and there are some attempts at humor involving disguised identities. As in the previous serial, there is a mystery involving two women, Ida Thorne and Diana Loring, who resemble each other, yet seem unrelated. A dying confession ties up the remaining loose ends and Nick arded with a letter of commendation from Chief-Inspector Wheeler of the United States Secret Service.

Since Dey's first three NICK CARTER serials overlapped each other in publication dates (the final part of one appeared the same week as the first part of the next one), there may be a good reason why there is such a similarity in their plot structures. The author was starting a new one as soon, if not before, the previous one was completed. TRACKED ACROSS THE ATLANTIC may be the most well-known of these titles since it was referred to in more than one early article about the publication history of NICK CARTER. It is probable that only the writer of the first article actually read the story and that the others merely copied from that secondary reference. Reports to the contrary, it is not the longest of the NICK CARTER serials, and there is no reliable evidence (apart from the anecdotal) that whenever Dey felt like wrapping up the story the editor suggested he continue it. The plot is episodic, but that is the way Dey wrote at this period in his literary career.

This novel begins very well and for the first third it is a tightly knit plot. Chick is used to advantage and assumes the identity of Felix Parsons in the search for evidence that Livingston Carruthers is smuggling diamonds into the United States from Europe. Carruthers is presented as an authentic danger to Nick Carter, whose own character is revealed behind even the thickest of disguises. No disguise seems to fool Carruthers.

Not content to leave well enough alone, Dey introduces Olga Plovatsky, the Russian-born "nihilist queen," whose presence complicates Nick's life as well as the plot of the novel. By making her a villain alongside the diamond smuggler, but not involving her with the main crime plot, it becomes a case of too many crooks spoiling the plot. In another subplot, Chick, smitten by the wife of Livingston Carruthers, is rendered less than able and is even thought dead for several chapters.

In the end, Carruthers' secret hiding place on board ship for the smuggled diamonds is revealed in a clever scene and Olga Plovatsky disposes of herself with a vial of poison.

Perhaps Dey was more comfortable writing the shorter novelettes for the *Nick Carter Library*, than in managing a complex plot required to keep readers following a multi-part serial over several weeks time. It would be more than a decade before his imagination would be adequately ignited for him to produce the stories for the *Nick Carter Weekly* which ushered in the "Golden Age" of the series. While exciting in places and genuinely mysterious, TRACKED ACROSS THE ATLANTIC does not completely fulfill its promise.

Frederick William Davis (1858-January 4, 1933) was the most dependable writer on the Street & Smith payroll. In the 19th century he began writing detective stories for the *Boston Globe* under the pen name Scott Campbell. Some of these were later published by Street & Smith as books

in the MAGNET DETECTIVE LIBRARY and made part of the NICK CARTER series. His earliest efforts showed the influence of Arthur Conan Doyle and thus Nick Carter was Sherlock Holmes in disguise. (For an extended discussion of the influence of Arthur Conan Doyle on Frederick Davis, see my article "The Great Detective's Pupil" in *Baker Street Miscellanea*, no. 39 (Autumn 1984): 9-12, 21.)

Never late with a manuscript, never known to complain, a truly gentle person, he did what few dime novelists were able to do: he collected his paychecks and lived within his means. He actually saved his money until he had enough on which he could retire. Henry William Ralston, vice-president of the firm, praised him for being unique.

Davis was also the best *writer* of the three under discussion here. He was 42 when he joined Street & Smith and his first NICK CARTER serials for the *New York Weekly* were published in 1906 when he was 48.

The crime in Davis's first serial in 1906, NABOB AND KNAVE, is a series of jewel robberies in fashionable homes, but the investigation is centered on the theft of Mrs. Planchet's jewels.

This is the first novel among those examined for this study where the identity of the villain is not apparent from the beginning of the story or where the identification of the crook is not made before the middle of the story. There is a believable motive for the thefts (the thief needs the money to cover his gambling debts) and there is genuine concern that the detective may not be able to prove his case.

The title, NABOB AND KNAVE, means something here and serves as the main clue to the identity of the villain, for it is Dr. Planchet who proves to be a knave posing as a nabob. Unfortunately, Nick has no evidence to convict him (he grinds his teeth in anger) and must resort to setting as trap to catch the master crook and his accomplices in the act of committing a crime.

There is good characterization here which makes the characters more than cardboard. They may be melodramatic and the descriptions may seem slight, but the characters are vivid and memorable, if only for the time it takes to read each serial.

Plainly enough, Doctor Planchet was exhibiting another side of his character—that evil side which a feeling of desperation, born of dread of exposure, brings at times to the surface of a man leading a double life. His face was pale, his eyes darkly glowing, his lips drawn and severe—none of which signs of his anger and resentment, however, appeared to awe or intimidate the bold, sharp-eyed maid whom he confronted. (p. 195)

From the opening lines, "Nick Carter pressed the electric bell, and Chick Carter thrust his hands into his pockets, and waited in silence for the summons to be answered," (p. 5) to the final scene, the reader is aware that this novel is the work of a professional storyteller, someone who knows where his plot is going. There is faster pacing here; with no staccato dialogue designed to mark time and fill space; it is all smooth and natural. Each character speaks in a manner that is appropriate to that character's personality, even if Dr. Planchet starts every second sentence with the interjection "Hey!"

It is a lighter, more sophisticated style and story, and yet it's a bit flat for all of its excellent aspects. In spite of the references to other, concurrent cases there is little sense of there being a larger world beyond the pages of this single story. Nick, Chick, and Patsy seem to have no other life than solving one case after another in the pages of a Street & Smith publication. Unlike the tales of Coryell or Dey, there is no great cast of secondary characters to populate the world of the great

New York detective. Davis works best with a small canvas.

Frederick Davis's Nick Carter still goes in disguise, but the situations are so underplayed the reader forgets he is disguised and his disguises seem to be better than before. One character remarks, "Nick Carter has more faces than Dame Rumor has tongues. He was there in disguise." (p. 198)

Davis was probably given instructions to work within certain limitations on the series. He did the best he could and did nothing with the character of Nick Carter to lose the many readers on which the publishers depended. He even included some of those humorous passages that can so often enliven the most banal text.

Daylight comes early in June [one chapter begins; Davis seems fond of setting stories in June] and it was only a little after eight o'clock the followig morning when Nick Carter, having completed his investigations at the Vandyke residence, arrived home.

He found his chief assistant, Chick Carter, engaged in opening the morning mail; [home for Nick is also his office and the base of operations for his entire staff] while Patsy, another young member of his detective force, was filing the data relating to a case which Nick had recently brought to a desirable termination.

"Well, where the deuce have you been all night?" Chick impulsively inquired, looking up when Nick entered.

"I was invited to become a guest of one of the four hundred," replied Nick, laughing, while he laid off his coat.

"One of the four hundred, eh?"

"That's what."

"Gee! but you're getting swell," cried Patsy with a grin. "The next we know, you'll be in a box at the horse show." (p. 62)

One thing is the same. Davis's Nick Carter is not going to be putting on airs, anymore than the Nick Carter of Coryell or Dey.

The other characters in the NICK CARTER stories written by Davis seem to respect him, but they are not in awe of him for his reputation. He is a much more approachable figure.

The mystery in Davis's second *New York Weekly* serial, CAUGHT IN A WEB (book title: AT MYSTERY'S THRESHOLD; OR, A MASTER OF CRIME) is a genuine one. The reader is drawn to wonder what the solution may be and there is no shock for the sake of shock, no constant reminder that this is a baffling mystery is needed. It begins in the middle of things to hook the reader followed by a flashback to explain the basic situation and get to the true beginning of the case. The story of the missing heiress, Medora Vandyke, leads Nick from Park Avenue high society to Hooley's Bohemian Hotel on Fourth Avenue.

The excellent examples of deductive reasoning on Nick's part suggest that Davis has not forgotten the lessons in storytelling he gained while writing his SHERLOCK HOLMES pastiches. For instance, the amount of dust on a door bolt indicates to Nick whether it has been thrown open or not; a twist of woman's hair found on a window fastener is dry, but it had rained the previous afternoon, and therefore the hair is a recent deposit.

Davis restates questions about the mystery frequently enough to help the reader review the facts of the case. The story is more tightly plotted than either Coryell or Dey's examples discussed above, and it is more naturalistic (if not strictly realistic) and more plausible. The detectives even take time out to eat although we never learn just what their favorite foods might be. The dialogue moves the story along, informing characters and readers alike about what is happening, making a joke of

something that actually foreshadows coming events. Again, Nick places less reliance on disguise; it is something that is used only when necessary, not for the sake of demonstrating the detective's ability. The disguises seem more plausible; there are no caricatured alter egos of countrymen, speakers with heavy dialects, or Chinamen. Often Nick appears in his own person since few people really know his features. The newspapers must not run his picture often enough for his face to be familiar.

Nick can make mistakes as he does when he calls on Nathan Clay, bank cashier at the Emerald Trust Company, and fails to look up in time to notice anything in Clay's reactions that might reveal the man's duplicity. The author takes the reader into his confidence, but not his main character, so for the time being, the reader knows more than the celebrated detective.

No matter what the danger (Nick sealed inside a cask and thrown onto a wagon; Chick falling down a dumbwaiter shaft) there is a sense that Nick is in charge and will not fail. The reader has necessary reassurance in the midst of the danger and suspense. The writing continues to be smooth, effortless, with all the threads of the tangled plot never given a chance to get out of control.

Davis possessed a fertile imagination and was not content to repeat the same formula story after story, at least not in his opening scenes. In *FOUND DEAD; OR, THE MYSTERY OF A VACANT HOUSE* (book title: *REAPING THE WHIRLWIND; OR PLAYING FOR BIG STAKES*) the crime is brought to Nick's attention by Kennedy, the uniformed patrolman who figures in the first serials. In an otherwise empty room, there sits a corpse, his head shaven, his false teeth missing. Nearby is an abacus and a sheet of paper with Chinese writing on it, in his pocket is a crumpled letter addressed to Karl ("Plunger") Skreed.

That there are similarities between this case and the previous one is not surprising. (Each deals with a missing daughter and a bank cashier.) Davis may have started writing the second story almost as soon as the first one had been completed; the first installment of *FOUND DEAD* appeared in the *New York Weekly* the week after the final installment of *CAUGHT IN A WEB*. Echoes of the first story must have remained with him.

Davis seems to have had some difficulty with this story since it is not as plausibly worked out as the previous one. Having begun with a magnificent mystery worthy of Ellery Queen, the second half of the story is somewhat far-fetched. Halfway through the story, Nick is hired by a woman to find her father; of course, she turns out to be the daughter of the murdered man. It is almost by accident that he realizes that stenographer Janet Bond may not be as innocent as she seems and this precipitates his solution of the mystery. But the constant reader of the *NICK CARTER* stories must have been used to willingly suspend disbelief.

On the credit side, Davis treats Nick's slow recovery time from so many assaults on his person in the story in a refreshingly realistic, if not painless, manner. There is the leavening ingredient of humor when Nick or Chick are in disguise and encounter each other without one completely recognizing the other. As Nick climbs out of the dry cistern in which he had been imprisoned, only to be jumped by Chick who sees only a shadowy figure, and their amazed discovery of each other's identity is comic relief indeed.

Frederick W. Davis wrote only a dozen *NICK CARTER* serials for the *New York Weekly*. Based on the evidence of these first three he wrote, it is too bad he did not write all of them.

What, then, does this comparison of techniques, styles, and stories seem to mean? It may be as simple as that no matter how formulaic the

NICK CARTER stories were, with the need for editor-driven consistency among pseudonymous authors, there was still room for individuality. Whoever the editor of the NICK CARTER stories was (perhaps Thomas C. Glynn, who edited the *New York Weekly* for so many years), he was an editor without a heavy hand. Each of these three writers: Coryell, the creator; Dey, the main writer; or Davis, the dependable; was allowed to develop the character of Nick Carter along lines he felt best promoted the character and the series. Perhaps this is one of the reasons the series lasted as long as it did.

STORIES READ FOR THIS ARTICLE
(*New York Weekly* dates of appearance)

John Russell Coryell. The Old Detective's Pupil; or, The Mysterious Crime of Madison Square. September 18-December 11, 1886.

_____. A Wall Street Haul; or, A Bold Stroke for a Fortune. March 12-June 18, 1887.

_____. Fighting Against Millions; or, The Detective in the Jewel Caves of Kurm. September 29, 1888-January 19, 1889.

Frederic Merrill Van Rensselaer Dey. Nick Carter and the Green-Goods Men; or, The Great Detective's Thrilling Adventures in a New Field. January 2-June 18, 1892.

_____. The Mysterious Mail Robbery; or, Nick Carter's U. S. Government Case. June 18-October 8, 1892.

_____. Tracked Across the Atlantic; or, Nick Carter After the Smugglers. October 1, 1892-January 28, 1893.

Frederick William Davis. Nabob and Knave. January 27-March 24, 1906.

_____. Caught in a Web. September 22-November 17, 1906.

_____. Found Dead; or, The Mystery of a Vacant House. November 24, 1906-January 19, 1907.

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1893 - Jan. (2-5), Feb. (2-6), March (Vol. 3, No. 1), April (3-2), May (3-3), June (3-4), July and August (3-5), Sept. (3-6), Oct. (3-7), Nov. (3-8), Dec. (3-9).

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By Darrell C. Richardson

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Dozens and dozens of great novels, serials, stories, and articles appeared in each annual volume. At least twelve or more serials were published in each volume. Many of these were later published as books. Many of these books were deluxe editions with decorated covers and color illustrations. Quite a number were lost race tales.

Some writers in *CHUMS* were Eric Wood, T. C. Bridges, Sydner Horler, Captain Charles Gibson, Harry Collingwood, John Hunter, Percy F. Westerman, Max Pemberton, John G. Rowe, D. H. Parry, Alfred Judd, H. Mortimer Batten, Olaf Baker, Maxwell Scott, S. Andrew Wood, Elmer Mason, Capt. Oswald Dallas, Eric W. Townsend, Thomas W. and Mary Henshaw, W. B. Hume-Gull, Capt. F. A. M. Webster, F. S. Brereton, W. Bourne Cook, S. S. Gordon, Martin Walker, Edward Blair, F. A. Talbot, Rowland Walker, and others.

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DELIGHTFUL READING

By Rocco Musemeche

A once-a-week column written by a friend in a metropolitan newspaper never fails to evoke strong images in the nostalgic sphere. Take the last one, a trip into an old bookstore replete with ogling and fondling before purchasing one of the tomes staring down from cobwebs and dust.

He failed to give the title of the book he purchased, but he sure did bring up some old gems from way back. He awakened dormant interest and in doing so, gave impetus to thoughts of rereading a few of my old pulps and juvenile boy series books. And, yes, a few of the treasured hard cover books, some of which are unopened.

Even the weather cooperated. It was not rain but deluge that filled the street and the pretty stiff wind whipped sprouting blooms with disrespect and short mercy. It was a good day and night ahead for some flailing of my own, pity the pages. Here was an invitation to some good reading with the classics of yesteryear as my treat this day and night. Let the selected favorites rise Lazarus-like to assuage jaded appetite. Not too difficult to select either, for many familiar favorites leave behind a trail easy to follow as the footprints Friday left for Robinson Crusoe to ponder.

My library is a floor-to-ceiling mishmash of an accumulation dating to my introduction to TARZAN OF THE APES an age thirteen. Yipes! what adventures and development in reading and collecting. From TARZAN to BILLY WHISKERS, to the ROVER BOYS, to TODD/OTT, to TOM SWIFT, to Lowell Thomas, Robert Elegant and Jeffrey Archer. All right, I left out that one time excursion of curiosity with a RUTH FIELDING, remember her?

Did I mention the bookshelves lining a wall above the bed, or the dresser drawers crammed with works of Theodore Roscoe, Fred MacIsaac, George F. Worts and Frank L. Packard. In yonder corner are two boxes containing a marvelous heap of Charles Alden Seltzer westerns and the great French Foreign Legion tales by Percival Christopher Wren. Have I whet your reading interest?

So with idle hours ahead in raising aloft the rereading of boyhood epics to sublime heights we delve into a private pool of goodies, to embrace, to absorb and devour the printed words. But, first one must make preparation, like finding the perfect zone of retreat, of non-disturbance, that so peculiarly fashions linkage with readers the world over. The comfortable reading position is a must, be it hammock, the sofa or grandpa's favorite armchair. In my case it's flopped against a pillow abed, light streaming from a bedside lamp full upon the printed page. It's been that way for me the past sixty-five years.

Oops, I've just plucked TOM SWIFT CIRCLING THE GLOBE, a remembered favorite, but look, next is TOM SWIFT IN THE CITY OF GOLD, and I'll have a fight choosing between the two. Both were purchased from the book rack next to the sweet-smelling soda fountain in Kahn's Drug Store. Come to think of it, here is where purchase was made of my first ROY BLAKELEY as well as TARZAN AND THE JEWELS OF OPAR. I remember this well for I left the girl I dated then for the love of La, the High Priestess of Opar. I remember La—do you? Kids sure somehow get tangled up with beauties. I somehow associate La with perfume on account of the perfume counter was near the bookrack.

Next to TOM SWIFT AND HIS GIANT MAGNET (the only dust-jacket I lack for a SWIFT), begins the OAKDALE BOYS and HAL KEENE series. The colorful dust-jacketed DON STURDY series are just below and next to my DICK HAMILTONS.

Excitement grips by now since thoughts race to Otis Adelbert Kline, the near as can be author to Edgar Rice Burroughs. However, hold, for methinks RETURN OF TARZAN may be read next. The recall of change-of-pace Burroughs employed in the RETURN book sure pulls strongly. Wow, was there ever a plethora of J. Allen St. John illustrations as in RETURN?

I am now thumbing cautiously through browning pages of my pulp collection, some as dangerously brittle as those full-page stories in a New York newspaper featuring Ted Roscoe's great true mysteries. Look, there is one of my all time favorites, THE UNKNOWN ISLAND, by Macisaac, and next George F. Worts' THE GRAPEVINE MURDERS, followed by HAUNTED BELLS, by Madeleine Sharps Buchanan, two of the niftiest mystery writers of all time. Praise again for Frank L. Packard, author of such delightful blockbusters as GOLD SKULL MURDERS, PURPLE BALL and HIDDEN DOOR. Stories like these are just plain not written any longer.

Here is a copy of BRASS COMMANDMENTS, by Charles Alden Seltzer, the smoothest western writer ever. All right laugh, but you do not feel a jarring sensation riding with Seltzer.

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This all leads to a call to friend Joe Ruttar in Philadelphia who is busily engrossed in concluding the sequel to that PERRY LANE AND THE SECRET OF THE PYRAMID, a book he wrote a few years ago. Pretty nifty work some experts claim to be most look alike to Leo Edwards as any that ever appeared.

Books and Pulp have a way of getting past your defenses so what do I care; the wife has just entered the room with a hot cup of coffee to make my reading a bit more delightful.

* * * * *

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JACK SCHORR

Jack Schorr of Anaheim, California, died on December 27, 1993. He was an active collector of boys and girls series books as well as dime novels. Jack contributed to the Dime Novel Roundup during the '70s and '80s, and was active in the collecting circles of southern California. He was a great man and will be sorely missed by his many friends.

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LETTER

Congratulations to our own Victor Berch. Madeleine Stern's fifth compilation of Alcott thrillers, just out, is dedicated to Victor who doubtlessly was responsible for unearthing much of the material. I heartily endorse this volume to members of our Fraternity. Knowing Victor as we do, we enthusiastically award him the official Triple A rating for research: Alcott/Adams/Alger.

It is my sad duty to report the death of Marie Dizer, Jack's beloved wife. She was stricken suddenly in the latter part of October, and died the first week of December. A memorial service was held for her on Saturday, December 11, at Plymouth Bethesda Church, Ithica, New York, attended by family and many friends.

Those of us who know Jack and have had occasion to visit him were always graciously received by Marie, welcomed at all times and even offered lodging in an emergency. Her generosity, kindness, and unerring hospitality were the hallmarks of all our happy visits at their home in Ithica, and we recall with great affection her many shining examples of the culinary art. We will never forget the precept Marie always represented: "Go Thou And Do Likewise."

May eternal peace be hers, and please keep Jack in your thoughts and prayers. An occasional phone call from his many friends would certainly not be out of line.

Peter C. Walther
16 W. Fulton St.
Gloversville, NY 12078

* * * * *

Ballou's Monthly Magazine, March, 1869, is the source of the following article. It comes from the collection of Gilbert K. Westgard II.

LEE AND SHEPARD OF BOSTON.

There is no publishing house in the country whose imprint we oftener see, or which presents a better class of books, than that whose name stands at the head of this paragraph. Both, though still young men, have had long experience in the book business, Mr. Lee having been the active man of the late firm of Phillips, Sampson & Co., and Mr. Shepard, of the firm of Shepard, Brown & Chase, both of tried knowledge in the manufacture and sale of books, and both with the new and progressive ideas of business that are in keeping with the spirit of to-day, through which alone is success attained—the success, that, we are happy to believe, has attended their efforts, giving them a name of wide celebrity, and a more substantial return than mere fame. Their publications are various, comprising works peculiar to a general publishing house; besides which they publish serial works of great popularity—mostly juveniles—that command a wide sale. Among these are the

several "Optic" series, and the "Boys' and Girls' Magazine," that has attained a great circulation. From the substantial and permanent to the lighter and more ephemeral and popular in literature, their subjects are weighed with care, and rarely a "stick" occurs to cumber their shelves with unsalable wares. Their style of print and getting up a book have no superior in the country, neatness, distinctness and durability forming the principal features, their printers being marvels for correctness, and their binders the best in the art. There never is seen, in the commonest of their books, anything slovenly or hurried, which too much mars the publications from even the best houses in New York and elsewhere, and the monogram of Lee & Shepard never favors aught that is inferior in matter or in typographical execution. Their popularity among the book craft is at its height, and for business capacity and integrity they have no superiors. Wherever energy and intelligent application can make way and make money out of it, they excel. Among the many publications which they have given to the public are the "GOLD HUNTER" Sketches, that have run through many editions, and have just been completed by the "*Gold Hunters in Europe*," a book that promises a success equal to that of its predecessors. The leading "out-door" man of Lee & Shepard, and for a series of years their manuscript "reader," is Mr. George M. Baker, a gentleman excellently well qualified for the executive position he holds. As a literary caterer for the public, he knows from the start what will succeed, and his intuitions are always correct. He is very popular with the trade, and his personal friends among the public are numerous, strengthening and aiding the firm to which he is so valuable an attachment. He has contributed several interesting works to the dramatic literature of the day, besides others of a less elaborate character, which have been published by Lee & Shepard.

P. S. "THE DEAD ALIVE: or, *Our Gold Hunters in Europe*" is issued in a handsomely bound volume, and will be sent by us, post-paid, to any address upon receipt of \$1.50. The three volumes, "THE GOLD HUNTERS," "THE BUSHRANGERS" and "THE DEAD ALIVE" will be sent, post or express paid, for \$4.00. Address *Ballou's Monthly Magazine, Boston, Mass.*

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28	good	\$6	70	good	\$6	109	good	\$6
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33	cover damage	\$3	73	good	\$6	112	good	\$6
34	cover damage	\$3	74	good	\$6	113	good	\$6
35	cover damage	\$3	75	good	\$6	115	good	\$6
37	good	\$6	76	good	\$6	116	cover damage	\$3
38	cover damage	\$3	77	no cover	\$2	117	cover damage	\$3
39	good	\$6	78	good	\$6	118	good	\$6
40	good	\$6	79	good	\$6	120	good	\$6
41	good	\$6	80	good	\$6	123	cover damage	\$3
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